

*The Historical Trail 1989*



**Walter VanSant**

# **The Historical Trail**

Yearbook of the Historical Society and the  
Commission on Archives and History of the  
United Methodist Church

Penny Moore, President of the Historical Society  
Charles Green, Chairman of Commission on Archives and History  
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## **FOREWORD**

Greetings:

Another exciting edition of our Historical Trails awaits you. Each article will interest you I know. In this issue, you will find the following articles: In Memorium: Walter Bassett VanSant, Preserving Church Records, Harry Hosier: The Black Forerunner of American Methodism, John Wesley United Methodist Church, Swainton, New Jersey, Earliest Methodist Preaching and Historic Edifices in Southern New Jersey, and Reflections on One Hundred Twenty-five Years of Seaville Camp Meetings.

We praise God for your continued interest in the work of our Southern New Jersey Conference Historical Society. We praise God that our great editor, Dr. J. Hillman Coffee is well enough, after by-pass surgery, to work on this issue. We also praise God for each of you who support us with your dues, your articles, your prayers and encouragement.

PENNY MOORE  
PRESIDENT

★ ★ ★ IN MEMORIAM ★ ★ ★

WALTER BASSETT VANSANT  
(1893-1988)

In the life of the Southern New Jersey Conference Historical Society and its sister organization, the Commission on Archives and History, the contributions of one layman stand out over the last thirty years. We dedicate this issue of *The Historical Trail* to his memory—WALTER VANSANT.

"Uncle Walt," as he was affectionately known, became an officer in the Society in 1955, serving as Vice President and for ten years, treasurer. When the Commission on Archives and History was formed in 1969, he was elected a member and served for six years as the Commission's lay member on the Conference Council on Ministries. He continued to serve as an advisory member of the Society and the Commission nearly to the time of his death. At his passing he was still serving as a member of the Society's "Friends of Old Estellville Methodist Church Committee."

His historical interests extended beyond the Conference to active participation in the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference. Beginning in 1956 he attended more than twenty-five annual Jurisdictional historical conferences. At one time he was an Area Vice President.

Uncle Walt's trips around the country always found him visiting United Methodist historical sites and returning with pictures of the same. He probably knew and visited more United Methodist historical places in the United States and Canada than any lay person in the church.

During Walter's lifetime and upon his decease, he donated to the Conference Historical Library and Archives nearly two hundred historical volumes, a nearly complete set of *Methodist History* magazines plus numerous articles and clippings. In addition, a collection of about 1200 slides of Conference Churches past and present is being assembled to become a part of the historical collections of the Conference.

Walter VanSant was born March 25, 1893 in Linwood, New Jersey, the son of John and Sarah Risely VanSant. For more than sixty years, until he moved to his retirement home at Malaga Camp, he lived in the home where he was born as his father had before him. He was a plumber by trade and had his own business in which two of his sons later joined. He was active in community as well as church affairs.

In 1917, Walter married Miss Florence Price. They became the parents of Emerson, Wayne and Kenneth and a son who died in infancy. His wife of sixty-two years died in 1979. Sons Wayne and Kenneth survive their Dad along with seven grandchildren and several great grandchildren.

Walter was a churchman of the first rank and was a member of Linwood's Central Church for seventy-three years. In 1915, Evangelist Tom Jones held meetings for seven weeks in Central Church and a great revival broke out. Night after night the church was crowded and trolley cars filled with people were turned away at the door. Among the 150 converted was Walter VanSant. The conversion was real and lasting.

He served his church for thirty-eight years as Sunday School Superintendent, was a trustee for fifty-two years and trustee president for forty-two. He was church lay leader from 1940 to 1959. His deep interest in youth led him to lead the church in building a Social Hall in 1926. His church honored him as "Man of the Year" in 1971.

But he was no parochial Christian. For long years he served as a lay member of Conference, was a sub-District lay leader, member of the Conference Board of Lay Activities, Committee on Camps and Conferences, Malaga Camp Committee and was a District Steward and Trustee. He understood the workings of the church on all levels and received the high honor of serving as Jurisdictional Conference Delegate in 1964 and 1968 and the even higher honor of General Conference Delegate in 1968 and 1970.

Walter VanSant was a man steeped in his family heritage. He knew his roots and was proud of his heritage. The VanSant family from which he came were at one time either boat builders or Methodist preachers and some combined the building of boats with lay preaching. He attended VanSant Family reunions around the country. One of his great joys was to help host the VanSant reunion in Ocean City in 1982.

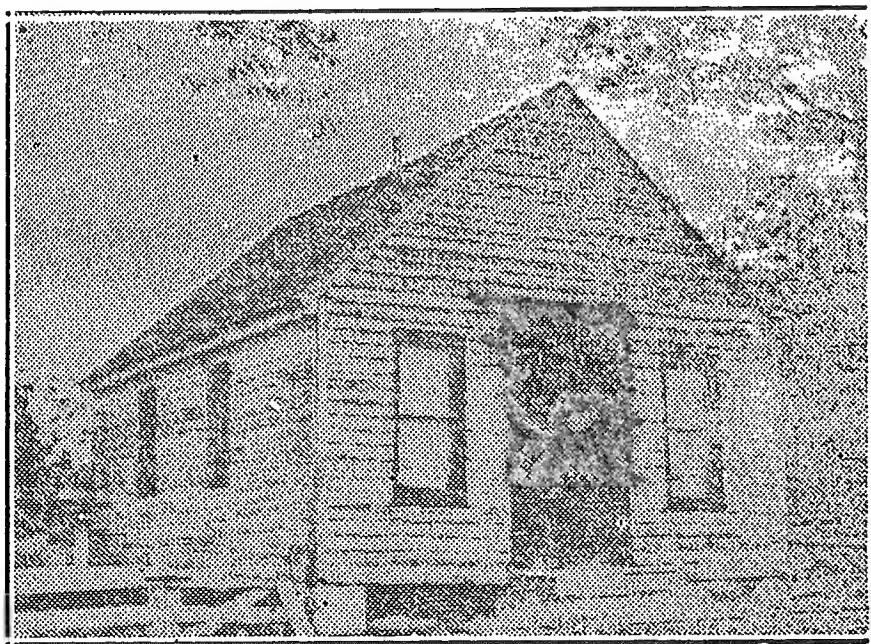
Yet more than anything, Walter was a dedicated Christian. He believed in the old fashioned Sunday. To him it was a day for church going. Commercial and business interests were not for the Lord's Day. For years, every Sunday he attended morning Services, Sunday School, led a mission Sunday School in the afternoon and was in church at night.

He and Florence were ardent believers in total abstinence from alcoholic beverages. For them this was a personal matter of Christian conviction, inseparable from being a Christian. All knew where they stood on that issue.

Walter was a lover of the Bible and a man of prayer. A few years before his death he said he had read his Bible through eighteen times. He continued to read it until the Lord called him home. He was a praying man. His prayer list was long, but no one on it was ever neglected. This writer knows he was prayed for daily by this man of God.

As a follower of Christ, Uncle Walt knew that death was but a gateway to heaven. On July 13, 1988, at the age of ninety-five, the Lord called him home. Funeral services were held at Central Church on July 18. They were conducted by his pastor, the Rev. Harvey VanSciver, the Rev. G. Willard Southwick and his nephew, the Rev. Robert B. Steelman.

This issue of *The Historical Trail* is dedicated to his memory.



*This old building is one that was used by John Wesley United Methodist Church from 1840-1908*

## PRESERVING CHURCH RECORDS

In an attempt to preserve information in deteriorating area church records, the library of the Gloucester County Historical Society at 17 Hunter Street, Woodbury, N.J., began a project in 1975 of photocopying vulnerable church records on archival paper, the "Church Records Preservation Program."

To date, forty-five churches in Burlington, Camden, Cumberland, Gloucester and Salem Counties have been copied. Thirty-seven of those churches were Methodist.

St. Paul's United Methodist Church in Paulsboro, N.J., was the first church to use this service in 1975. Ironically, while the 1855-1939 records were being copied in the Society's library, thieves broke into the church and stole the most recent records from 1940-1975. They have never been found.

All expenses for this service are undertaken by the Society as a community service and the utmost care is taken for the safety of the records. While in the library, they are kept in a temperature and humidity-controlled vault. The archival copies are also kept in a vault and are available to the host church at any time.

Because of financial limitations, only the membership, baptism, marriage and burial records are being copied, except for minutes, treasurer's reports, etc., that predate 1840.

Any church interested in this service may call Mrs. Edith Hoelle, the librarian, at (609) 845-4771 for further information.

## CHURCH RECORDS' PRESERVATION PROGRAM

*Gloucester County Church Records Xeroxed as of 11/1/88*

Bridgeport (Methodist) — 1856-1974

Centre Square Methodist — 1896-1964

Clarksboro (Evangelical United Methodist Church, originally the old German Evangelical Church) — 1888-1973

NOTE: Copied at their request.

Clarksboro (Zion United Methodist Church) — 1832-1949; 1970-1974

Clayton (Methodist) — 1860-1958

Cross Keys (Methodist) — 1888-1977

Downer (Methodist) — 1872-1978

Ewan (Methodist) — 1878-1940

Franklin Twp. — Plainville, Porchtown (Methodist) — 1898-1983

Franklinville (Methodist) — 1911-1966  
 Glassboro (Episcopal) — 1848-1979  
 Glassboro (Methodist) — 1856-1916  
 Glassboro (Meth. Protestant, now Trinity Bible) — 1841-1955  
 Harrisonville (Methodist) — 1851-1960  
 Mantua (Methodist) — 1861-1972  
 Mantua Twp. — Mount Zion (Methodist) — 1856-1954  
 Mullica Hill (Methodist) — 1859-1979  
 Paulsboro (Methodist) — 1855-1939

NOTE: Record book of 1940-1975 was stolen before we could xerox it.

Pitman (Methodist) — 1886-1931, 1932-1957

NOTE: Board of Trustees requested copies to stop at 1931; later requested us to keep up to 1957.

Pitman (Baptist) — 1907-1981

NOTE: Copied at their request.

Swedesboro (Methodist) — 1838-1934

Richwood (Methodist) — 1890-1978

Thorofare (Methodist) — 1879-1979

Wenonah (Methodist) — 1885-1981

NOTE: Requested by Board of Trustees for completion by their 100th anniversary.

Westville (Methodist) — 1941-1984

NOTE: Earlier records missing.

Williamstown (Methodist) — 1856-1955

Woodbury (Methodist) — 1853-1958

Woodbury (Presbyterian) — 1819-1958

Woolwich Twp. (Methodist) — Old Stone Church Class Book — 1836-1845

*Camden County Church Records Xeroxed as of 11/1/88:*

Blackwood (Methodist) — 1858-1949

Chews Landing (Episcopal) — 1789-1886

Gloucester City (Methodist) — 1900-1950

Sicklerville (Methodist) — 1872-1887, 1915-1948

Winslow Twp. (Methodist — Elm, Blue Anchor, Waterford) — 1874-1920

*Cumberland County Church Records Xeroxed as of 11/1/88:*

Bridgeton (Central Methodist) — 1865-1920

Bridgeton (Methodist — Laurel Hill) — 1910-1938

Port Elizabeth (Methodist) — 1778-1953

Deerfield (Presbyterian) — 1746-1904

*Salem County Church Records Xeroxed as of 11/1/88*

Alloway (Baptist) — 1844-1880

Penns Grove (St. Paul's Methodist) — 1885-1958

Salem (Baptist) — 1755-1950

Sharptown (Methodist) — 1839-1953

Upper Pittsgrove Twp. (Methodist-Friendship) — 1808-1980

*Burlington County Church Records Xeroxed as of 11/1/88*

Bordentown (First Methodist) — 1835-1904

Bordentown (Trinity Methodist) — 1895-1975

Burlington County Circuit (Jacobstown — Wrightstown — Pointville — Cookstown) — 1870-1875

**HARRY HOSIER:  
THE BLACK FORERUNNER OF AMERICAN METHODISM**

by Mark J. Kingston  
(Nephew of William Kingston)

The story of Black Methodism is one that is tinged with the reality of a long struggle for equal representation and equal opportunity for involvement in the ministry of the Church. It has only been fairly recently in the history of this nation that American Methodism has taken decisive measures to improve the status of ethnic minorities. Nevertheless, the work of Black people is an integral part of the development of American Methodism as a whole.

This story could not be told without first making mention of the man who in his day was considered to be the most gifted Methodist preacher in America. Within the early days of the colonial period, this was none other than Harry Hosier, known by most of his contemporaries as "Black" Harry. Though he had not received formal education of any kind, it was said of Hosier that his eloquence in self-expression and his command of the English language far surpassed that of any of his formally educated colleagues. His capacity for the memorization of the Scriptures, his wealth of illustrative vocabulary, and his method of sensitive self-expression through his style of intonation enabled him to become the most successful and popular Methodist preacher of his time.

Harry Hosier was born in Fayetteville, North Carolina in approximately 1750, though this date is not certain. It is the belief of many historians that Hosier was the slave of Dorsey Gough, the rather famous owner of the elite "Perry Hall," a large plantation near Baltimore. Though historians have no certain records as to the date of Hosier's manumission, it is known that Francis Asbury, the first general superintendent of the Methodist Church in America, had visited the plantation in March of 1776. It is quite possible that at this time, Asbury and Hosier first became acquainted. We do know for certain, however, that the former writes in his journal on June 29, 1780 about a certain Black man whose oratory skills greatly impressed him; the name of this man was Harry Hosier. It was thereafter that Hosier travelled with Asbury as his companion and fellow colleague in the Methodist preaching ministry.

Hosier preached to Blacks and whites alike. His first occasion to preach to a mixed audience was in May of 1781. Preaching to a large audience, he used the familiar story of the barren fig tree taken from

Matthew 21:15-21 and Mark 11:13-14, 21. Dealing with the themes of judgement, repentance, and faith, Hosier had such an effect on the audience that even the white contingent, which had first come with an attitude of scorn, readily agreed that God had bestowed a marvelous gift to the Black man who they saw with Mr. Asbury. This response on the part of white people as well as Black people did not alter, either. Hosier continually received positive recognition and appraisal from the people to whom he preached, regardless of their race. This was so much the case that only five months after Hosier's first public interracial preaching engagement, Asbury, concerned about Hosier's sense of self-image, wrote in his journal on October 21, 1781, ". . . I fear his speaking so much to white people in the city has been, or will be, injurious; he has been flattered and may be ruined."<sup>1</sup> Regardless of the amount of recognition which he earned, however, Hosier was not easily given to a haughty or belligerent attitude. Hosier accepted the responses of the people who heard him as the simple reward for his labors, and yet continued to offer his preaching as his service of commitment and dedication to God.

During their preaching tours, Hosier and Asbury usually followed a specific format for preaching the Word of God to the people. It was Hosier's responsibility to first preach a message of judgement, sin, and salvation to a group of whites and Blacks alike. The purpose of this message was to enable the listener to be confronted with the opportunity for a personal response to the claim that Jesus Christ is Lord and Saviour. Once the audience was confronted with a choice either to accept or reject Christ, then Asbury or another white minister came forward and delivered a doctrinal exposition on the teaching just administered by Hosier. In this joint preaching effort, the effect was not only to enable the listener to hear about the sweet blessings of God's grace and the choice which one had to make in order to receive that grace, but it was also to enable the listener to understand in the context of evangelical Methodist doctrine just what that grace was all about: salvation from sin, misery, and judgement, resulting in the peace and joy of everlasting caliber which was the essence of restored fellowship with God. It was this format of preaching which Hosier and Asbury used during their very important six-month preaching tour in the early 1780's.

Hosier accompanied Thomas Coke on his first tour of Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia. Coke was the personal representative of John Wesley to the United States, responsible for the giving of the first Methodist *Discipline* to the circuits and also for the revealing of Wesley's

own guidelines for the Methodist Episcopal Church in America. Early in 1781, Hosier led Coke through his first tour of the aforementioned three states in the Union. From this time on, Hosier won Coke's heart. Coke was so impressed with Hosier's personal stature and his preaching abilities that he had much to say in compliment of Hosier. In his journal of November of 1784, he had this to say about Hosier: ". . . I really believe that he is one of the best preachers in the world—there is such amazing power (that) attends his word, though he cannot read; and he is one of the humblest creatures I ever saw."<sup>2</sup> This impression of Hosier was significant not only for the personal friendship which the former shared with Coke, but also for the development of Coke's own ministerial endeavors as well. It was largely in part because of Hosier's influence that Coke became the champion leader in Methodism's struggle for the abolitionist movement.

Hosier also received recognition from the major statesmen of his day. One notable example was Dr. Benjamin Rush, member of the Continental Congress and signer of the Declaration of Independence. Having had the opportunity to hear Hosier several times, Rush succinctly submitted his evaluation of the latter: "He is the greatest orator in America."<sup>3</sup>

Significant to the history of race relations in American Methodism is the fact that Hosier was also present at the landmark Christmas Conference of December 24, 1784 to January 2, 1785, held in the Lovely Lane Chapel of Baltimore, Maryland. It was here that the machinery for the Methodist Episcopal Church was formed. Thomas Coke, Francis Asbury, Thomas Vasey, Richard Whatcoat, and several others who had been commissioned by Wesley to form the Church under his direction participated in this significant and crucial Conference. It was at this Conference that Asbury was formally ordained deacon, elder, and then general superintendent (bishop) of the new Methodist Episcopal Church of America. Along with Asbury, Coke, and the other representatives of Wesley, also present at the Conference were Harry Hosier and another Black preacher, Richard Allen, later the founder and first bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Though Hosier and Allen did not have the same involvement in the Conference proceedings as did Coke and Asbury, the fact that they were considered to be adequately significant representatives of the American Methodist ministry in order to be involved with the Christmas Conference is a very important item, not only in the history of American Methodism, but in the history of race relations as a whole.



Hosier and Allen were without question the two most significant early figures in the history of Black Methodism. It has been argued by some historians, however, that of the two, Hosier was not the same representative of Black determination that Allen was. This postulate is debatable. It would seem to be rather self-evident that Hosier and Allen were of different temperaments. For example whereas Hosier accompanied Asbury during all of his preaching travels, regardless of the racial hostility which may have been strong in certain areas, Allen decisively refused to accept one of Asbury's requests that he join him on a preaching tour to the Carolinas for fear that the residents would not give a Black man the proper care if he were either ill or in danger. Also, whereas Hosier usually gave a firm but gentle response based upon the Scripture when he was victimized by white bigotry, Allen went so far as to organize an entirely new Methodist Church of Black people when he and several other Black Christians were not permitted to pray with the whites at St. George's M.E. Church in Philadelphia. This fact alone demonstrates a marked difference in personality and approach between the two figures. Nevertheless, it is an overstatement to assert that Allen was more significant for the advancement of Black people in the Methodist Church than was Hosier. It must be remembered that Hosier was the first Black preacher in American Methodism to preach to whole groups of people, white and Black alike. Hosier was the first American Black preacher to achieve recognition and popularity on an almost national level. Hosier was the first genuine representative of an inclusive ministry within the Methodist Church. More to the point than even all of these, Harry Hosier was the first to establish through his life and ministry an important precedent for the future work and involvement of Black ministers in the Methodist Episcopal Church. If it weren't for Harry Hosier, it undoubtedly would have taken much more time for American Methodism to begin taking its stand against white bigotry and oppression than it had. Harry Hosier is the sole figure who best represents the attempts on the part of the American Methodist Church to promote an inclusive ministry for both lay and clergy alike. Regardless of how American Methodism may have failed in the future to live up to this fundamental truth of the Christian faith that all people, without regard to race or color, are of equal worth and stature in the eyes of God and therefore must be so in the eyes of the people, Harry Hosier's presence has gone down in history as the corrective example to racial inequality in Methodism. From the time of his first preaching engagement to an interracial congregation in 1781 and

thereafter into the pages of history, if ever there is a question as to whether the inclusive ministry should be the responsibility of all Christians who are members of what is now the United Methodist Church, the answer will first be provided by Harry Hosier . . . the answer is affirmative!



*John Wesley United Methodist Church, Swainton, New Jersey*

## ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Menking, Stanley J., gen. ed. *200 Years of United Methodism: An Illustrated History*. Madison, NJ: Drew University, 1984.

An excellent historical summary published for the 1984 Bicentennial Celebration of the Methodist Church in America, written in consultation by editors of the United Methodist Archives and History Center of Drew University.

Ness, John H. Jr. & Louise L. Queen, eds. *Methodist History*, vol. 8-12. Lake Junaluska, NC: Commission on Archives and History, The United Methodist Church.

An excellent periodical publication which contains short biographical sketches and comparative analyses of significant people and events in the history of Methodism.

Norwood, Frederick A. *The Story of American Methodism*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1974.

The most recently edited full treatment of the history of Methodism in the United States: easily readable, covering the earliest planting of Methodism in America to the present; a well-done treatment of historical Black Methodist clergy and laity is included.

Richardson, Harry V. *Dark Glory*. New York, NY: Friendship Press, 1947.

A very good account of Black religious and social life and of race relations in the rural South of the 1940's; includes historical background on the colonial period and its impact upon later social arrangements in the South.

Smith, Warren Thomas. *Harry Hosier—Circuit Rider*. Nashville, TN: The Upper Room Publishing Co., 1981.

Unquestionably one of the best short and concise biographies of Harry Hosier ever written.

Stevens, Abel, LL.D. *A Compendious History of American Methodism*. New York, NY: The Methodist Book Concern, n.d.

A lengthy but easily readable and superbly written review of American Methodism from its earliest period to the late 19th century; a good treatment of the lives and ministries of Harry Hosier and Richard Allen.

## ENDNOTES

1. John H. Ness Jr., & Louise L. Queen, eds. *Methodist History* vol. 10, no. 1 (Lake Junaluska, NC: Commission on Archives and History, The United Methodist Church), p. 23.
2. *Ibid.*, vol. 12, no. 4, p. 164.
3. *Ibid.*, vol. 12, no. 4, p. 150.

## JOHN WESLEY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH SWAINTON, NEW JERSEY

Truly, God's ways are beyond the understanding of humankind!

Little did the mistress of a plantation in Raleigh, North Carolina, in 1823, realize that she was witnessing "history in the making" as she watched one of her slaves, John West, pass through the plantation gate one Sunday evening. Knowing of John West's religious work, the plantation mistress mistakenly thought he was going to a church service at a neighboring plantation. She would have been stunned if she had known the "sermon" in John West's head that night was titled, "Go North, John!"

Keeping far from busy paths of travel, John and two companions, after many miles of walking and using rowboats and by enduring hunger, danger, and other hardships, finally reached New Jersey where they separated. John, with nothing but his deep, personal, religious faith in and love for God to sustain him, trudged wearily along Goshen Creek. Finally, when he could go no farther, John approached a man in Goshen to ask about employment. To the slave's amazement, Jedediah Tomlin hired John. God was also in New Jersey—working out His plan.

In time, John wanted a life companion who shared his strong, religious beliefs and who would understand the needs of the black people. He paid for the freedom of Elsie Smith who became his wife. According to the census of 1850, the Wests had seven children.

There was no money, however, for building a new church; but in a neighboring town the members of the Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church voted to sell the Old Asbury Church and erect a New Asbury Meeting House on the same site. John West and his congregation soon made arrangements to buy and have Old Asbury Church put on rollers so it could pass down the winding, dirt roads (some of which had to be "brushed out" or made wider) that finally reached Goshen. This church, because of a runaway slave from North Carolina, became the first organized Negro church in Cape May County. This became official at a Quarterly Conference in 1840 held at Dennis Creek when John West, representing the members of his congregation, requested that they have their own Quarterly Conference. The request was granted. Goshen Methodist Episcopal Church became a charter member of the old Delaware Conference organized in 1864.

The present John Wesley United Methodist Church in Swainton (formerly Goshen Methodist Episcopal Church) was built in 1908 by

descendants of the West congregation. Lineaus T. Swain donated the land. The frame is white oak cut by church members on the Leaming property (Old Three-Keys Farm on Shore Road) and hauled by wagon teams to a sawmill.

Arduous tasks, such as gathering and selling swamp berries, were performed by dedicated men and women determined to build a house of worship in their community. After succeeding in erecting a strong, sturdy church building, they also built a five-room parsonage which housed a succession of ministers and their families for over thirty years. The noted Charles A. Tindley, founder of Tindley Temple United Methodist Church in Philadelphia, served as one of these early ministers.

With the passing of the years, the John Wesley Church was put on a two point curcuit. The parsonage was no longer needed. During the 1960s, plans were made to connect the parsonage to the church building. These plans were completed in 1971. Now, the congregation enjoys an all-purpose room, a kitchen, two restrooms, and a pastor's study.

With the help of members, friends, and two grants from the Board of Missions of the United Methodist Church, the John Wesley United Methodist Church had its dedication (on a debt-free church) in May 1974.

One hundred and sixty-six years ago, a plantation mistress lost a slave, but the Southern New Jersey Conference of the United Methodist Church gained a Christian congregation while the world has gained persons whose lives God has changed. No one can even guess the effect of these lives upon society. Yes, God had a plan. One runaway slave did his part in helping to carry out that plan. What is the future? God knows.

MIRIAM L. COFFEE  
from information received from  
Rev. Randolph Fisher, the pastor,  
Catherine A. Lawson, a church member,  
Edward M. Post, custodian of the  
Cape May Historical Society

## EARLIEST METHODIST PREACHING AND HISTORIC EDIFICES IN SOUTHERN NEW JERSEY

George Whitefield's Journals tell of many times and places where he preached here.

On November 12th in 1739, he preached in the still existing Old St. Mary's Church on Broad Street in Burlington, then an Anglican Church.

The next day, being an Anglican clergyman, although being a guest of the Rev. Gilbert Tennant, a Presbyterian, he "read the Church Liturgy, and preached in the meeting house at New Brunswick, for there was no place set apart for the worship of the Church of England."<sup>1</sup>

The same month he met with Frelinghuysen of Raritan and Cross of Basking Ridge, other leaders of the Great Awakening,<sup>2</sup> and he writes of preaching at Lawrenceville (then Maidenhead) "from a wagon to about 1500 persons."<sup>3</sup> One may find other references in the same *Journal* such as his preaching to thousands on the knolls of Amwell, near our historic Old Rocks Church above Lambertville.

Whitefield's convert in Philadelphia, Edward Evans, became a lay pastor of Methodist Anglicans at Berkley, near Clarksboro. Francis Asbury visited this group six months after coming to Philadelphia from England. On the 14th day of May, 1772, he wrote, "West to the new church. Surely the power of God is amongst this people!"<sup>4</sup>

John Atkinson, in his *Memorials of Methodism in New Jersey* (pp. 144-145), gives his reasons for stating that this was "the first Methodist meeting-house, or Church in New Jersey."

The present St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Clarksboro is the lineal descendent of that congregation of the Methodist layman Edward Evans.

Irish Methodist emigrants contributed much to the founding of the Methodist movement in America. John Early arrived in the early 1760's and preached in the area bounded by Mantua, Hurffville and Aura. His grave is in the Hurffville Cemetery.

Probably the original structure of Union Chapel at Aura, the plans for which were given by Asbury himself, was built as a result of the preaching of Father Early, as Asbury called this preacher. That original structure dates from 1806 and was greatly enlarged in 1878.

But let us go back before 1806. Captain Thomas Webb, after preaching in Burlington, placed Joseph Toy in charge of a Methodist Class on the 14th of December, 1770. Some years later, in 1788, a frame building was built on Library Street to serve as a meeting house. That

building still exists as a barn on a farm outside Burlington on Burrs Road two miles north of the Mt. Holly Road.

Occasional services are held today in the Old Stone Meeting House outside of Swedesboro, built in 1793, and in the 1792 frame structure at Head of the River, Tuckahoe. The latter Church deserves special mention. Every year, a large congregation gathers largely made up of descendents of those whose mortal remains lie in the historic graveyard. The large building is thought to be the oldest Methodist Church in South Jersey still in use.

Thus, the three earliest Methodist structures still extant from the early Methodist days in our Conference are (1) The Burr's Road Barn, (2) The Head of the River Church, and (3) The Old Stone Church.

I quickly list others:

Aura, already referred to, 1806

Batsto-Pleasant Mills Meeting House, 1808 and dedicated by Asbury himself, a year later.

West Long Branch, 1809

Alloway, 1820

Absecon, 1829

Sharptown, 1833

First Church, Bridgeton, 1833 (rebuilt 1935).

Highstown, 1835 (Now a residence next to the present stone Church).

The earliest Methodist Class in South Jersey was probably the one led by Joseph Toy in Burlington beginning in 1770. The forming of trustees of a society in Trenton dates from 1771. A deed of purchase of property for a church in Pemberton (then New Mills) bears the date of 1774. The historian John Atkinson states that following the early Methodist meeting house of Edward Evans in West Deptford, Gloucester County, the Trenton Methodists built in 1773, followed by Pemberton in 1774-1775.

Documentation corrective of the above data would be much appreciated by the writer.

F. ELWOOD PERKINS

## ENDNOTES

1. *George Whitefield's Journals*, Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1960, pp. 346-347.
2. *or.cit.* p. 351.
3. *or.cit.* p. 353.
4. *The Journal of Francis Asbury*, Epworth Press, London, 1958, vol. 1, p. 30.



*John Wesley United Methodist Church, Swainton, New Jersey*

## REFLECTIONS ON ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF SEAVILLE CAMP MEETINGS

The one hundred twenty-fifth anniversary of Seaville Camp Meeting held July 17-31, 1988, at South Seaville, New Jersey was one of nostalgia, fun, and praise to God for His presence throughout these years.

Before the 1988 Camp Meeting even started, a recognition dinner for past presidents reminded us of the tradition of the lovely, old grove of oak and pine with its tabernacle in the center calling all to worship. Since the dinner was held in the tabernacle and all space was needed, all the furniture except the organ and piano were removed. Blanche Osborne played background hymns while we enjoyed a catered meal served by women from local churches. Every ticket had been sold, and all the diners enjoyed the highlights of experiences revealed by former presidents as they recalled their term of office. Later, of course, every bench and table were exactly replaced because Camp Meeting 1988 would begin in earnest the next day.

Sunday morning found us gathered at the flagpole for the traditional flag raising ceremony that opens Camp Meeting. This year, a surprise awaited us. Smaller American flags had been rolled up in the larger one for a repetition of an old tradition. When the flag was raised, the small flags fluttered down and were quickly gathered by the children for souvenirs, just as they had been years ago.

In times past, at least three services were held every day when the ringing of the bell would call people to worship. This year, two services were held by having an additional service in the afternoon. Dr. Kenneth Kinghorn, a professor at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky, spoke at both the 11:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. services.

Music is an important part of camp meeting. Over past years, great choirs like the Tindley Temple Choir of Philadelphia have sung at Seaville Camp Meeting. Camp Meeting 1988 enjoyed the great Jubilee Choir of the Macedonia United Methodist Church in Ocean City.

Some outstanding preachers and evangelists have spoken at the camp meetings of the past. At this anniversary camp meeting, we were blessed by the messages of Dr. Henry H. Nichols of Community United Methodist Church, Chester, Pennsylvania, and Rev. David L. Bailey, founder and director of Ranch Hope for Boys in Alloway.

Memories came flooding back as each event reminded us of our heritage. Women, dressed in period costumes, greeted people at each service.

On Ladies' Day, a play, researched and written by Penny Moore, that depicted periods of time from 1863 to the present was presented. Each time segment began with a town crier (Lora Carr) who set the scene by calling historical events of the past as well as the cost of foods and clothing, etc. In one scene, Dorcas Naglee and Josephine Colkitt took us back in time to the earliest days they could recall when the tabernacle was just a speaker's platform. Later a roof and frame covered our tabernacle. Straw covered the floor, and coins often fell into it. Ladies wrapped their legs in newspapers to ward off mosquito bites. Hymnals were sold at a dollar each. Oil lamps were an improvement over the old pine knots. Pumps provided clear, cool water for drinking and washing, but a bath meant walking a mile and a half to a local lake. There was, of course, no running water, no electricity in the cottages which originally consisted of just one room down and one upstairs, which was reached by a winding stairway. Some people lived in tents.

Formerly, crowds (often numbering in the thousands of people) came many miles by horse and buggy and railroad for the encampment. Those who came by train to the local station were met by a horse-drawn hack with fringe on top. Horse sheds were constructed at the back of the property for the horses. The roads, then and now, were dirt and often water would be sprinkled on them to keep down the dust. Dorcas and Josephine remembered it all.

In the early years, meals and lodging were provided at the Boarding House. Small stores sold ice cream, baking items, candy, etc. A barber-shop and a post office were also on the Camp grounds. Then, as well as now, camp meeting was a busy time.

One of the celebration events that is memorable is the silver tea where old quilts, many made by cottagers, were on display. Former cottagers were guests at the tea.

Our celebration took us back many years in Methodism to the days of Love Feasts. Rev. Dr. Robert L. Curry, pastor of historic St. George's United Methodist Church in Philadelphia, led us in a Love Feast. In his costume, Dr. Curry looked just like John Wesley. In this outstanding service, we used loving cups which had been sent from England by John Wesley to Francis Asbury.

One of the original cottages, which still has no modern facilities, was opened for us by Mrs. Corson so that we could have a museum. Many

were welcomed by Doris Endicott, in period dress, who showed us the many snapshots, programs, clothes and memorabilia of former days. A testimonial service prior to the evening worship service brought back nostalgic memories to many of us.

All of us can remember those picnics of the past with their sack races and three-legged races. An old-fashioned picnic was a must for our anniversary year. We enjoyed one on Saturday afternoon. We even heard the Chowder Band sing songs from the good old days like "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" and "Down by the Old Mill Stream."

Much time, research, and effort were put into the book *A TIME TO REMEMBER*, a history of New Jersey Methodists' First Camp Meeting, South Seaville, New Jersey, written by Audrey Sullivan and Doris Young. It is being sold as a hardback for \$5.00. A picture of every cottage and its history is included along with letters of remembrances from some of our oldest members. In Camp Meeting 1988, much happened that it is impossible to remember it all. Bible studies for all ages continued as always. Pot pie dinners, dessert socials, hoagie sales, craft night, men's breakfast and more are precious memories of this year. Our closing Sunday night service found us singing again "We're Marching to Zion" as we left the tabernacle to form a circle around the flag pole outside. Testimonies and prayers of thanks were given for a most successful 125th camp meeting under the leadership of our president, Rev. William Thielking who wrote a hymn for this occasion. The flag was lowered, and another camp meeting went into history.

It is my prayer that camp meeting will be a source of inspiration, love and fellowship for at least 125 years more. We invite everyone to come and join us as we sing praises to God with the old gospel songs and hear the messages of salvation again—ever old, ever new, ever challenging. Camp meeting in South Seaville will take place from July 16-30, 1989. We are located on Dennisville Road in South Seaville. Look for our new white entranceways and our new signs. We'll be looking for you.

PENNY MOORE

## HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

Two significant collections of historical material have been added to our Archives and History room this year in the Bishop's Building on the campus of Pennington School. The article on Walter B. VanSant tells of the many books and outstanding church slide collection given by him. A second collection contains upwards of one hundred volumes of historical books and church Disciplines belonging to the late Mr. John W. Zelley of Burlington. A Life Member of the Society, John served as Secretary for many years and contributed much to the historical interests of the Conference. His widow, Carole, donated this collection of his books.

A bus load of Southern New Jersey historical pilgrims spent three days last May touring historic Boston under the aegis of the Society. The 1989 spring tour took us to Hopewell, Kingston, Cranbury, Hightstown and Princeton on May 20. Already in the planning stages is a tour to our nation's capitol April 26 to 28, 1990. These visits highlight United Methodism as well as other local historic spots.

Efforts are under way to enable the Conference's two historical agencies, Commission on Archives and History and Historical Society, to work more closely together. The Commission Chairperson is a member of the Society's Executive Committee and the Society's President has been named an ex officio member of the Commission. On April 4th, the second joint meeting was held at the Conference Archives. In this way the historical interests and work of both will be enhanced.

Another faithful supporter and officer in both the Society and Commission on Archives and History passed away last March. Louis J. Barbour, resident of Wanamassa, NJ and member of Old First United Methodist Church in West Long Branch, was an inspiration to all who knew him. These faithful workers will be missed, but their memory will long be cherished.

Membership in the Historical Society is still a bargain. Dues are only \$4.00 per person or \$6.00 a couple per year. Last year's membership was 222, plus 37 Lifetime Members. The Society also offers a Benjamin Abbott Life Membership at \$50.00 per member or church. Your dues can be sent to Mrs. Edna Molyneaux, 768 E. Garden Road, Vineland, N.J. 08360.

Ideas or manuscripts for future publication in *The Historical Trail* are always solicited. Contact the Editor, Dr. J. Hillman Coffee, RD #1, Sooy Place Road, Vincentown, NJ 08088.



Copies of *What God Has Wrought*, history of the SNJ Conference, can still be purchased at \$14 plus \$1.75 for postage and handling from:

Southern NJ Conference Office  
1995 E. Marlton Pike  
Cherry Hill, NJ 08003

REV. ROBERT B. STEELMAN  
HISTORIAN

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